

TRANSCRIPT OF THE
REMARKS OF WILLIAM J. CASEY

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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I appreciate your generous introduction.

I plan to talk to you about the Middle East in the context of some new dimensions which we see in the strategic balance between the Soviet bloc and the free democracies. In this context I want to look at the present dangers and how we can meet them in the Middle East, the area of our particular interest this evening.

I do it this way because I believe that today we are witnessing particularly intensive efforts to tilt the overall strategic balance against the West and because we Americans have failed, thus far, to see the interrelationship between what is happening in Central America and the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, and the South Atlantic and the South China Sea. Increasingly, what we are trying to do in the Middle East and elsewhere must be geared to an ever more aggressive Soviet involvement and the growing danger from radical and violent groups operating in the Middle East. And while we confront this threat, we must continue to protect our overall strategic posture from similar and complementary pressures elsewhere.

We all know roughly the history of the strategic balance and how essential it is to protect the free world. From the beginning, the Soviets had the dominance in land warfare. This was countered by American superiority in strategic weapons. By 1980, the Soviet strategic offensive forces had

caught up and, in many areas, surpassed ours. The Soviets are now protecting their land-based missile force by making it mobile, whereas the U.S. mobile missiles will not be deployed until sometime in the 1990s.

They have for well over a decade conducted a vigorous missile defense program. They are completing a missile defense system around Moscow. We have no comparable system.

Facing this combination of offensive and defensive missile forces capable of a first strike against our nuclear deterrent, our SDI research is examining whether effective defenses, which threaten no one, can provide a more stable deterrent.

While we negotiate to scale down the huge nuclear arsenal with which the two superpowers confront each other, a more insidious threat may be developing.

This massive nuclear and conventional force which the Soviets have may be only a shield to make it easier and less risky to intimidate and subvert weaker governments and to gobble up pieces of territory around the globe.

They have acquired bridgeheads in Cuba and Vietnam, in South Yemen and Ethiopia and Angola, and Nicaragua, Cambodia and Afghanistan and elsewhere. These bridgeheads are being linked in a growing logistical and support network supported by expanding Soviet naval and air power.

In the Caribbean, the Soviets have created in Cuba the strongest military force in the Western Hemisphere, with the exception only of our own. Over the last few years, they have given Cuba massive infusions of military hardware.

Today, we have an extension of this Cuban base on the American mainland in Nicaragua. Similar links and components of this network have been established all around the globe. From Angola, Soviet naval and air forces now routinely operate astride Western shipping lanes in the Atlantic.

Similarly, this network threatens Western sea lanes in the Red Sea, in the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean from bases in Ethiopia and South Yemen. And Soviet naval and air forces operating out of our former bases at Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang in Vietnam command the vital sea lanes linking Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea with Middle East oil supplies and their Southeast Asian allies.

It is the Mediterranean segment of this Soviet global network which here concerns us most. It is anchored in Libya and Syria, which are gaining influence and control in Lebanon and Sudan to further squeeze Israel and the moderate Arab states of the Middle East.

These bridgeheads are very real and they are not static. They have a purpose. They are locating their strategic choke points in the world's sea lanes or in areas of high tension or potential conflict. They are being used to spread subversion and terror and spawn new bridgeheads in neighboring countries. From Cuba and Nicaragua terrorism and subversion are being

exported throughout Central America and into Chile and Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America. From Libya there is invasion of Chad, attempts at destabilizing governments in Egypt and Tunisia, Zaire and Sudan and subversion throughout West Africa. From Angola there are intrusions into Zaire. From Soviet-occupied Afghanistan there are continuing incursions into Pakistan.

And we have a new Soviet leader, Mr. Gorbachev, and already a hallmark of his regime is an intensified effort to nail down and cement these bridgeheads and make them permanent. Having piled close to two billion dollars worth of arms into Angola, Soviet advisors and Cuban troops are feverishly preparing a campaign, likely to be launched this month, and designed to wipe out the forces resisting the Marxist government of Angola.

Starting two months ago with half-a-billion dollars worth of sophisticated weapons recently acquired, the Sandinista Army with Cuban helicopter pilots and combat direction, has been going all out to destroy the Contras down there before the Congress acts to renew assistance to them. Last week some 1,500 Sandinista troops crossed the Honduran border for this purpose and this week we have seen thousands of Miskito Indians of the eastern part of Nicaragua driven across the border into Honduras.

The Soviets are also moving hard to nail down their bridgeheads in the Middle East. In South Yemen we have recently seen the application of the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine which says: "Once communist, always communist."

The government there had begun to open up to the West. Hardline pro-Soviet exiles returned from Moscow and initiated a coup against the South Yemen President. This coup soon escalated into a bloody civil war between military and tribal elements loyal to the President and those of the hardline Soviet camp there. And after the Soviets watched the blood flow for a few days, planes flown by Soviet pilots pounded pro-government forces and Soviet weapons began to flow into the country to rebel forces.

We have seen this message before. In Afghanistan in 1979 and in Grenada in 1982. It has told us that leaders of governments installed by Moscow who seek improved relations with the West do so at their peril. The Soviets are not ready to brook any challenge in any part of their empire.

Now until recently in all this, the Soviet hand was more carefully screened and more subtly used in the Middle East. Today the Soviet investment in Syria and Libya is at an all-time high, with some 6,000 Soviet bloc military advisors and a massive arsenal there of Soviet planes, tanks and rockets in these two countries. These two countries, along with Iran, have discovered in terrorism a new low-cost, low-risk method of attacking democratic governments in Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. Terrorism is today an integral part of the foreign policy and defense apparatus of these states. Tiny Libya (some 3 million people) reaches south into the heart of Africa and east to press, together with Ethiopia, on Sudan. And we see Syria pushing hard to complete its domination of Lebanon and bring sophisticated Soviet weapons south, closer to the Israel border.

The only thing that the Soviets have to sell in the Middle East is weapons and munitions. They will expend major effort to preserve the traditionally Soviet-dominated arms markets in Iraq, Algeria and North Yemen against Western competition. They will work to expand the Soviets' share of traditionally Western-dominated markets, particularly in Jordan and Kuwait, and to win back a share of the market in Egypt and Sudan. We can expect to see enhanced Soviet or Soviet-controlled reconnaissance and firepower all along the coast of the eastern and southern Mediterranean. We can expect them to step up their efforts to reunify the PLO and convince Syria to end its dispute with its Arab rivals.

It is also possible that to sabotage U.S.-sponsored peace negotiations, Moscow might back an aggressive Syrian military posture towards Israel, abandon Arafat, throw full support behind the leftist and Syrian-backed factions of the PLO, and provide greater backing for the subversive elements of Libya and other radical leftist groups. Thus, from the north, Syria; from the west, Libya; from the south, South Yemen; and from the east, Iran and perhaps Iraq -- all threaten the stability of the Middle East and have the potential to surround Israel and the oil fields of the region. The United States and Israel have a shared vital interest in arresting this pattern of Soviet and radical expansionism.

This creeping imperialism has, in my view, two primary targets worldwide--the oil fields of the Middle East which are the lifeline of the Western alliance and the isthmus between North and South America.

Afghanistan, South Yemen, Ethiopia, as well as Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, and Mozambique and Angola in southern Africa, bring Soviet power much closer to the sources of oil and minerals on which the industrial nations depend and put Soviet naval and air power astride the sea lanes which carry those resources to America, Europe and Japan.

Capabilities to threaten the Panama Canal in the short term and Mexico in a somewhat longer term are being developed in Central America, with Soviet support, by Cuba and Nicaragua. They work quietly and steadily toward their objectives of building the power of the state security apparatus, building the strongest armed forces in Central America, and becoming a center for the export of subversion to Nicaragua's neighbors and further into Latin America and up into Mexico.

This expansion of the Soviet empire, while still threatening, has been slowed if not halted. In the decade of the 1980s, the Soviets have not acquired a single new colony. The Soviet Union cannot support its empire economically. For every country that has embraced it, Soviet Marxism has become a one-way ticket to oppression and poverty.

During the 1970s, people in many parts of the world were flocking to join communist insurgencies. In the 1980s, this trend has been reversed. Today some half million people around the world are fighting in resistance movements against Communist regimes or Communist occupation. Afghanistan is virtually a nation in arms fighting against 120,000 Soviet occupation troops. In Angola,

Savimbi has some 60,000 fighters in all parts of the country battling the Cubans, the Marxist Angolans, and Soviet advisors. In Ethiopia, Eritrean and Tigrean rebels fight the Marxist Mengistu government and the largest army in Africa with its Cuban and Soviet advisors. In Cambodia, 50,000 insurgents struggle bitterly with 170,000 occupying Vietnamese soldiers.

These wars of national liberation being waged in Soviet colonies on three continents represent a geopolitical phenomenon of immense historical significance. Just as the Third World rejected Western colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s, so it is now rejecting Soviet colonialism in the 1980s. And it is using the Soviets' own strategy of armed guerrilla resistance -- wars of liberation -- to do so.

And if we hold firm, the pendulum of history will complete its swing away from Soviet Marxism as a model for countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and toward the concepts of democracy and a free market economy. In Latin America, for example, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are all functioning democracies. Elsewhere the Soviets have over-expanded and are on the defensive; and the radical Arab states are weak economically and without friends politically, while Egypt, Jordan and other Arab moderates are a majority, do have good friends and outside support.

What do we do about all this? To thwart the threat of Soviet expansionism and radicalism in the Middle East, we have used in this

government and will expand upon, together with our friends and allies, three inter-related strategies -- improved strategic cooperation, the pursuit of peace, and economic development.

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Together we must fight terrorism, a threat which faces all our friends in the Middle East and elsewhere. Middle East radicals dedicated to weakening the West and Israel are also dedicated to the destruction of moderate and pro-Western regimes in the Arab world. They are determined that a peaceful settlement never be reached, determined to polarize the Arab world so that no accommodation can ever be reached, so that Arab states pursuing a pragmatic course collapse in front of Marxist or fundamentalist assaults. The Soviet Union, while it cannot always control these movements, profits from them as they weaken or eliminate areas of Western influence in the region.

We remain deeply committed to pursuing a political process to end the Arab-Israeli dispute. The reinvigoration of the peace process is, in my view, of overriding geopolitical importance in order to deny the Soviets a lever for entree to the Middle East. We remain ready to assist the parties directly concerned to negotiate face to face a solution to their differences. We reaffirmed this determination to the Israeli Prime Minister last week.

Finally, we are convinced that economic development is critical to building barriers to radicalism and Soviet imperialism. Prime Minister Peres has proposed joint economic cooperation among Israel, Egypt, and Jordan under a new "Marshall Plan" style program. Already the United States provides more economic aid to these states than any others. We are determined to stand by this commitment. We hope that other states with an interest in the region -- including the Europeans and Japan -- will enlist in regional economic help.

So, strategic cooperation, diplomacy for peace, and economic development are the keys to maintaining the momentum built in these last years to halting Soviet advances in the Middle East. We have vital interests there and shared values with Israel. Working together we must maintain those values in the Middle East and the Mediterranean and elsewhere.